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Robert F. Arnove

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Education and Revolution in Nicaragua

Perhaps the single most impressive undertaking in the field of literacy campaigns is that of Nicaragua. Mounted within the first year of a revolutionary regime, the campaign was able to reduce the illiteracy rate from 50.3 per cent (N=722,431) of the population 10 years of age and older to approximately 15 per cent in 9 months.[1] This all-out attack on illiteracy occurred in a country devastated by a protracted civil war, with many of the country's youth killed and maimed, with a national economy in ruins, and a foreign debt per capita among the highest in the world.[2]

Yet, against this background of compelling national exigencies, 1980, the first year of the Nicaraguan revolution, was declared the Year of Literacy. Within 15 days of coming to power, in mid-July 1979, the new Government of National Reconstruction (GNR) announced that among other sweeping reforms—including confiscation of property belonging to the Somoza clan, nationalisation of the banks and the mining and lumber industries, land reform, the unionisation of workers, and the devolution of decision-making power to mass organisations—there would be a national literacy crusade. The literacy campaign, initiated on March 23, 1980, was to symbolise more than any other event or process the revolutionary transformations occurring in Nicaragua.

To the question, 'why literacy?' the Nicaraguans answer that the high literacy rate that characterised the country—and particularly the rural areas where illiteracy ranged from between 60 per cent and 90 per cent of the population—was an outcome of the feudal system of the Somoza dynasty, one that kept the vast majority of the population ignorant. As the Ministry of Education's description of the Great National Literacy Crusade [Cruzada National de Alfabetizacion (CNA)] notes: . . . to carry out a literacy project and consolidate it with a level of education equivalent to the first grades of primary school, is to democratise

a society. It gives the popular masses the first instruments needed to develop awareness of their exploitation and to fight for liberation. Therefore, literacy training was something that the dictatorship could not accept without contradicting itself.'[3]

Extending education to the vast masses of the people represented symbolically and substantively a conferral of citizenship rights. The literacy campaign constituted a fundamental mechanism for integrating the country—rural and urban populations, the middle and lower classes—and mobilising the population around a new set of national goals. In the process, the Sandinista political leadership hoped to win the majority of people to its vision of society organised according to a different model. While, as Richad Fagen has observed, Nicaragua is not a socialist country, socialism is very much on the historical agenda.[4] Presently, the Government of National Reconstruction[5] is nationalist, populist, and pluralistic.

It is important to note that the masses of people who rose in arms against Somoza and the National Guard[6] represented all political persuasions. They were not fighting for socialism, but against a corrupt and brutally repressive regime. They fought in the name of heroes such as Augusto Cesar Sandino, who led a popular insurrection against occupation of the country between 1927 and 1933 by the United States, and in the name of the martyred Carlos Fonseca Amador, founder of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional—FSLN) in the 1960s, and for the countless Nicaraguans, among them children and adolescents, who died in the struggle against the ruling elite. They were fighting for a more just social order—yet to be defined.

To transform the political culture of the country,[7] to inculcate a new set of values (based on more egalitarian social relations, cooperative forms of labour, workers' participation in decision-making, and international solidarity with national liberation movements), it would be necessary to establish a massive programme of education and re-education. And this education had to take not only the form of education *for* socialism—that is, schooling, media and mass campaigns to prepare people for new roles and behaviours and outlooks—but education *within* socialism. The latter means, to paraphrase

Arthur Gillette,[8] placing people, particularly youth, in nonalienating situations where they can engage in socially productive work that contributes to the general welfare and collective advancement: it is an education that puts theory into practice. The mechanism for this engagement of youth, as well as diverse adult populations, was the literacy campaign.

This paper will describe the scope, organisations, and content of the Nicaraguan National Literacy Crusade of 1980 and its aftermath. Special attention will be given to those aspects of the article that relate to the goals of integrating previously exculded groups and transforming the political culture of the country.

Scope and symbolism of the campaign

The extent of the mass mobilisation was nothing less than incredible. A campaign of this magnitude and brevity had not been undertaken anywhere. To reduce the illiteracy rate from 50 per cent to approximately 15 per cent within a period of 9 months meant that initially almost every person who knew how to read and write would teach those who did not, and moreover, as adult learners gained minimal literacy skills, they would in turn help those who lagged behind.

Only with mass mobilisation, with everyone studing, would it have been possible to find adults willing to face the painful, public embarrassment of attempting to write their names on a blackboard. Only with the universal participation of people of all ages would it have been possible for adults over 60 years of age to learn from youngsters 12 and 13 years of age.

A number of the colourful posters and billboards that adorned the landscape captured the spirit and significance of the literacy campaign. One reads:

En cada casa un aula
En cada mesa un pupitre
En cada Nica un Maestro!

Every home a classroom
Every table a school desk
Every Nicaraguan a teacher!

Another consists of two scenes; the top one depicting armed

people in the streets behind barricades fighting against the National Guard; the bottom one a rural thatched-roof hut with a literacy worker, book open, teaching an entire family (mother, father, and children). The captions read, 'Yesterday's Struggle' (next to the scene of the barricades) and 'Today's Struggle' (next to the family learning to read and write together).

The imagery and vocabulary of struggle and a national war loomed large in the symbolism of the CNA. Just as six guerrilla armies victoriously converged on Managua on July 19, in the wake of Somoza's flight from the country, so, on March 24, 1980, six 'armies' left Managua to wage war on illiteracy. The six national fronts of the People's Literacy Army consisted of some 55,000 *brigadistas* (literacy workers), mostly high school students, who would live in the rural areas of the country to work with, learn from, and teach the largely illiterate peasantry. The six fronts were divided into 'brigades' at the municipal level, and the brigades in turn were divided into 'columns' at the hamlet level. The columns had four 'squadrons' of 30 *brigadistas* each; the squadrons consisted of youth of the same sex and roughly the same age.

In the cities, the People's Literacy Teachers (numbering approximately 26,000) comprised a parallel war effort.[9] These teachers included factory and office workers, professionals, and housewives, plus high school and university students who for health or family reasons could not leave the city. The urban-based teachers taught after work or during their spare time. The usual pattern was 2-3 hours of instruction a day, Monday through Saturday.[10]

Teachers and university-level school-of-education students were mobilised to assist in supervising the literacy teachers, to provide inservice instruction, and to assist in the development of educational materials.

Although no one was officially required or compelled to teach or become a *brigadista*,[11] over 225,000 literate adults volunteered to participate in the CNA. At the time, the total population of Nicaragua was about 2.4 million, of whom 717,000 were at least 10 years old and literate.

Organisation

The deployment, logistical support, and protection of the literacy army members required the support of every national ministry and mass organisation. Literacy workers had to be transported to the remotest corners of the country, often inaccessible by road and four-wheel vehicles; they had to be housed, fed and safeguarded. The dangers *brigadistas* were exposed to in the countryside reflected not only the ravages of underdevelopment—the lack of potable water, the scarcity of food, and endemic diseases such as dysentery and malaria—but the imminent threat of terrorist attacks by over 4,000 ex-guardsmen who had fled to neighbouring Honduras and slipped across the border to terrorise and murder *brigadistas*—symbols of the revolutionary changes occurring in Nicaragua. In case of illness or injury there was a need for emergency medical services, and in case of counter-revolutionary attacks, there was a need for a permanent communications network to alert defense officials.

Complementing these efforts to place and support the *brigadistas* were activities to publicise the literacy crusade, identify those who did not know how to read and write, and encourage them to attend literacy units and complete the literacy process.

A National Coordinating Commission was established under the auspices of the Ministry of Education to determine broad policy and facilitate implementation of all these efforts. The commission consisted of 25 ministerial, political, military, educational, cultural, religious, and mass organisations: the Ministries of Culture, Interior, Social Welfare, Health, Planning, Transportation, and Public Works; the Institutes of Agrarian Reform and Development; the National Directorate of the FSLN; the Popular Sandinista Army; the Sandinista Defense Committees; the Association of Nicaraguan Women; the Association of Rural Workers; the Sandinista Workers Confederation; the Sandinista Youth of July 19; the Federation of Secondary Education Students; the National Association of Teachers; the Catholic Church and the Federation of Catholic Teachers; and the two universities—the National Autonomous University and the Central American University. Parallel coordinating commissions for the CNA were established at departmental

and municipal levels. According to several outside observers, the national and departmental committees were but shadow organisations; it was at the municipal level where the crusade took form, where organisational involvement was most intense and the mass of people participated.[12]

Mass organisation participation

The mass organisations that were instrumental in overthrowing the dictatorship were the key to the success of Nicaraguan teracy campaign. Organisations in Nicaragua had been formed at factory and neighbourhood levels by workers, women, and youth; they involved tens of thousands of Nicaraguans who provided supplies to the revolutionary army, set up communication networks, administered first aid; obtained and distributed weapons, and erected barricades to do battle during the uprisings of 1978 and 1979.

Following the victory, these mass organisations, in many cases renamed and reconstituted, took their place in the battle against illiteracy. The Sandinista Workers Confederation assumed responsibility for literacy-related activities in the factories, the Association of Rural workers for the rural areas, the Sadinista Defense Committees for urban neighbourhoods, and the Sandinista Youth for the participation of high school and university students in the People's Literacy Army. The Association of Nicarguan Women (AMNLAE) was responsible for mobilising women to participate in the campaign as both students and teachers. Teachers were another group whose participation was essential to the successful implementation of the CNA. Over 7,000 teachers assisted in the preparation, supervision, and in-service training of the literacy workers. In addition, they helped maintain educational, cultural, and recreational activities for youth while schools were officially closed between March and September. Most of the teachers were involved in assisting the literacy workers, who generally received a minimal preparatory course lasting 7 days. The focus of the training programme was not only on how to work with the literacy primers and the teacher's guide, but, for the largely urban, middle-class youth, how to survive and succeed in the often squalid poverty of the countryside.

Content and pedagogy of literacy materials

Learning activity centred on the basic reader *Sunrise of the People*.[13] The reader, based in part on the pedagogical ideas of the Brazilian adult educator Paulo Freire, contains 23 generative themes. Each theme, accompanied by a photograph, consists of generative polysyllabic words which can be broken down into basic sound and meaning units (Phonemes and morphemes) and recombined by the learner to form new words. The initial themes pertain to the revolutionary heroes Augusto Cesar Sandino and Carlos Fonseca Amador and progressively cover the topics of the struggle for national liberation; the termination of exploitation by foreign and national elites; the role of the mass organisations and the Popular Sandinista Army in defending the revolution; the rights and responsibilities of the citizenry in the new society; the achievements of the Government of National Reconstruction in undertaking land reform and in expanding and extending health care, education, and other social welfare services; the liberation of women from subservient roles; the integration of the long-abandoned Atlantic Coast region into the national society; and, finally, the commitment of the new revolutionary regime to solidarity with other progressive governments around the world. At the core of these themes are emotionally charged generative words. Appropriately, the first such word is *Revolucion*. Pedagogically, the words *La - Revolucion* contain all the vowels of the Spanish alphabet. Other generative words include *liberacion*, *genocidio*, and *massas populares*. To summarise the sequence of pedagogical activity: with the introduction of each photograph there was to be a group discussion of approximately one hour duration, followed by one hour of practice related to reading the text and decoding and encoding the generative words. The format, of group discusson, however, was frequently not followed—given the inexperience of the teachers and the reluctance of students to discuss issues publicity or question authority.[14]

While utilising a number of Freire's pedagogical concepts—concerning adult education as a political process involving consciousness raising and stimulating individuals to see themselves as makers of culture and transformers of their environment—the CNA also departed in significant ways from his educational

model. According to Freire's ideal, literacy workers should not arrive in a community with a prepared text, but should develop literacy materials in dialogue with the community.

In the case of Nicaragua, an all-out assault on illiteracy, using the volunteer labour of minimally trained and mostly young people, could not have been accomplished by strict adherence to the ideal model of Freire concerning content development (based on a socio-cultural and linguistic analysis of each community of the country). A primer was developed by a national team of educators in consultation was top political leaders.[15] To the credit of the Nicaraguan campaign, the literacy materials reflect careful pedagogical and linguistic planning in the selection and sequencing of content. The materials appear to be based on solid scholarship as well as respect for the experience and social world of the adult learners.[16]

The most common criticisms of the literacy materials are not those of scholarship, but of ideology. The most vocal opposition was directed at the pro-FSLN content of the literacy crusade. Those who object to political propagandising as part of the literacy process are oblivious to the indoctrination that occurs in all education systems.[17] What differs from one system to another is the subtlety of the indoctrination, the content of the messages, and the sociopolitical purposes of instruction. To repeat the fundamental question posed by Freire, is the object of a literacy campaign domestication or liberation?[18] Are the educational programmes designed to provide limited information so that people can better fit into the existing hierarchical structures and do the bidding of dominant groups,[19] or is the literacy process designed to provide an indispensable base of knowledge that opens up options for formerly dispossessed people, providing them with the understandings, skills, and attitudinal dispositions that equip them to play a decisive role in forging a new society?

The Government of National Reconstruction posits that under the successive regimes of the Somoza dynasty (1937-79), education worked to legitimate an inequitable social order that prepared elite groups for leadership roles while denying fundamental knowledge and skills to the vast majority.[20] In contrast to the passivity and fatalism fostered in the masses by the

previous regime, the new Sandinista-led government proposes to instil a different set of values and a radically different ideology. The materials used in the literacy and post-literacy educational campaigns are designed to prepare people to play a more active role in creating a more prosperous and just society. Consonant with the characteristics of the present political leadership in the country, the values of nationalism, populism, and pluralism are stressed—but also emphasised are the values of a country attempting to follow a model of development based on collective work efforts, personal sacrifice, and national austerity to create greater abundance.

Perhaps the most important lessons of the Crusade resided not in the literacy materials or the teacher-learner encounters, but in the very existence of the campaign itself. The literacy crusade was a symbol of justice, of the concern of the new political regime for the most neglected areas and populations of the country. It involved the extension of national authority and services into previously unreached corners of the society. The commitment of the revolutionary Sandinista regime was most palpably present in the 'brigadistas' who went to live with and assist impoverished rural families and in the 'urban-literacy guerillas' who worked in the poorest *barrios* of Managua and other cities.

Follow-up campaigns

Following the National Literacy Crusade, two major adult education programmes were initiated: the literacy campaign in Miskito, Sumo, and English for the inhabitants of the Atlantic Coast Region, and 'Education Popular de Adultos,' also commonly known as 'Education Popular Basica' (EPB). These programmes were placed under a newly-established Vice-Ministry of Adult Education (VIMEDA).

Atlantic Coast campaign

Geographically, historically, and culturally the Atlantic Coasts region has constituted a distinct and distant population, tenuously integrated with the Spanish-speaking Pacific Coast region.[21] The Atlantic Coast region contains approximately 45 per cent of the territory of Nicaragua but only about 8 per cent of its population. In large expanses of the East Coast—along

the Rio Coco and in the areas of Puerto Cabezas and Bluefields —the majority of the inhabitants speak either Miskito or Creole/ English as their native tongue. In scattered pockets along the Coasts between 2 and 5 per cent speak Sumo, Rama, and Carib. Many of the coastal peoples, *costenos*, however, speak two or three languages (principally, Spanish, English, and Miskito)[22] with varying degrees of fluency, switching back and forth between them according to the language situation.

According to the October 1979 census, 75 per cent of the region's population 10 years of age and older (n=88,389) were illiterate. Between March and August 1980, approximately 50,000 *costenos* participated in the Spanish-language literacy crusade, reducing illiteracy to about 30 per cent of the inhabitants of the coastal departments of Puerto Cabezas, Bluefields, and Rama. Many of the indigenous-speaking people who opted to acquire literacy in Spanish did so in order to participate in national institutions and communicate with the rest of the country. It also appears that the more pro-Sandinista inhabitants were those who sought literacy in Spanish.

By the end of the National Literacy Crusade, there was still a substantial number of *costenos* who were illiterate and who preferred to participate in literacy classes conducted in English, Miskito, and Sumo.[23] Between 11,000 and 12,000 people participated in and completed the indigenous languages campaign, which took place between October 1980 and March1981. With the completion of this campaign, illiteracy had been reduced to approximately 22 per cent in the Atlantic Coast region.

In the aftermath of the crusade (CNA) and the campaign in languages students, both young and old, entered the new system of Adult Basic Education (EPB). The core of this system consists of Basic Educacion Collectives (Colectivos de Educacion Popular, CEP), in which the sole language of instruction is Spanish. The Vice-Ministry of Adult Education has taken the position that knowledge of Spanish is essential to unifying the country and that it would be neither feasible nor desirable to erect a parallel system of instruction in a second or third language.

Adult Basic Education

The purposes of EPB are the following: to reach people who had not participated in the CNA or who had not achieved

literacy between March and August 1980; to build on the basic literacy skills acquired during the CNA and to foster application of these skills to improvements in home, work place, and community; and to prepare students for an innovative secondary education programme that would impart job-specific knowledge. The Education Collectives (CEPS) also serve as community agencies for implementing health campaigns, conducting surveys, and mobilising the populace for voluntary work projects, particularly in agriculture. As of December 1981, there were 167,852 participants in 20,561 CEPs (17,194 in rural areas, 3,367 in urban areas) with 20,222 teacher-animators (*coordinadores*) and 3,804 teacher-advisers (*promotores*). At the time, 59,310 students were at the level of learning basic literacy (using the primer, *Sunrise of the People*),[24] 49,286 were studying the first of four levels of adult education (each of approximately 4 months duration), and 59,256 were at the second level.[25]

What was perhaps not foreseen by planners in the Ministry of Education and VIMEDA was that the EPB would comprise a non-formal education system for both youth and adults. Given the poverty of the country, the need for children to help with remunerative work and household duties, many youths (for the most part ages 10 through 15) attend the two-hour evening classes (5 days a week) in the CEPs. For these youth, EPB represents the only available systematic education. Thus in many CEPs it is not uncommon to find children learning along with adults—and in some cases grandchild and grandparent work together in a shop by day and study side by side at night.

The implications of the education collectives are many. As one Ministry official has noted: The CEPs have changed traditional perceptions and notions of what constitutes an education system. The shift in EPB has been toward an adult centre, community-based education system, using non-traditional instructional personnel, inexpensive local materials, and geared toward collective social advancement.[26]

Outcomes

The outcomes of the CNA may be studied at various levels. The most obvious results are found in the number of adu

learners who passed the literacy test or completed so many lessons in the primers. Observers may also point to the physical improvements in communities where literacy workers resided.[27] At a more profound level, the outcomes of the CNA must be evaluated in relation to the transformation of political culture, the integration of previously alienated sectors of the country, the winning of the youth to the revolution, the changing male-female role relationships, and the strengthening of mass organisations.

Engagement of youth

Following the literacy campaign, many of the *brigadistas* continued their active involvement in the Sandinista Youth organisation (Juventud Sandinista 19 de Julio), participating in militia service and health campaigns, and contributing voluntary labour for different crop harvests.[28] Many have changed their career plans, entering, technical training programmes or professional schools geared towards the government's emphasis on agriculture, health, and education; and thousands continue to serve as teachers in Adult Basic Education. For example, at least one-fifth of the 24,000 instructional and supervisory personnel in EPB are former *bridgadistas* or urban literacy guerrillas. There are youths who frequently study by day, teach by night, and attend workshops on Saturday to upgrade their pedagogy.

While impressive statistics can be marshalled to indicate the commitment and involvement of youth, the most striking evidence may reside in personal accounts. The Vice-Minister of Education, Francisco Lacayo, narrates examples of youths 12 and 13, former graduates of the literacy campaign who are now teachers in EPB. In one town (in the Department of Juigalpa), the Vice-Minister encountered a 12-year-old youth with only 2 years of formal schooling who is coordinator of a CEP with 13 students and is supervisor (*promotor*) of 5 CPEs. Lacayo, who had been concerned about the fate of the CEPs which used barely-schooled instructors, notes: 'When I met this child my anguish left me and I went home to sleep peacefully.'[29] Beverly Treumann, one of a handful of US citizens who served as volunteers in the Nicaraguan National Literacy Crusade, provides an account of the transformations in her middle-class friend, Julia:

Before becoming a *brigadista*, Julia had described herself as a snob who would not greet the *campesinos* who came into town; who fussed a lot about dressing-up and putting on make-up; and who filed and painted her toenails. But according to Treumann's account:

> Julia now (at the end of the campaign) knows personally how most Nicaraguans live. She spent five months eating beans and torillas, sleeping with fleas, getting up at 4 A.M., sharing a bedroom with a whole family, hiking for miles through mud and rock without the convenience of even an outhouse. She knows lots of once-illiterate people whom she regards as far more talented and intelligent than herself. (The members of her peasant family)
> Julia, who had once viewed the crusade as a five-month act of routine patriotism after which life would return to its normal worries, has become courageous and self-sacrificing.[28]

Similar metamorphoses are found in the self-descriptions of many literacy workers. They narrate their former reluctance and fear to go to the countryside—their ignorance of rural life. As to what changes have occurred in their lives, almost to a person, they describe their appreciation of the *campesinos* and the countryside; they describe a great gain in self-confidence and a resolve to work wherever they are needed in Nicaragua.[31]

The militancy of youth is channeled through the Juventud Sandinista 19 de Julio. Some observers have classified the JS 19 the organisation 'which best reflects the qualities of a vanguard.'[32] As a case in point: the 560 delegates to the organisation's national youth assembly in Managua, December 19-21, 1981 had played a variety of overlapping roles in the revolution; 547 were 'militants' of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN): 467, production *brigadistas* and 322 were veteran guerrilla fighters from the struggle to overthrow Somoza. Of the group attending the assembly, 496 were former *brigadistas* in the CNA.[33] The wars against tyranny, followed by the crusade against ignorance; were mechanisms that initiated the mobilisation of youth. The youth are now available for a variety of tasks related to national reconstruction.

That the outcomes may be ambiguous and even perhaps contradictory—based on past biography, class position, and changing opportunity structures—is represented by the case of

Julia. Returning one year after the termination of the campaign, Treumann observed:

> Julia was a different story. She continues to volunteer for such things as health brigades and coffee harvesting, but when I asked about the revolution she wrinkled her nose, smiled and said she was 'contra'—short for counter revolutionary. 'She's joking,' said a friend of hers, but I didn't think it was wholly a joke. And yet, when I asked about the future, she said she wants to become an agronomist—an intriguing career choice much favoured by the revolution; no other could put her closer to the heart of the important social change. Her father frowns on it: 'Not a good career choice for a woman.' But her boyfriend not only approves but would like to study also.[34]

Changing female roles

Among the other changes that were to be accelerated and magnified by the CNA was the liberation of women from their marginal positions in the society. The war against Somoza initiated the transformation of women's traditional roles. During the large scale fighting of 1978-1979, women not only formed support groups, but played an active role in combat, comprising up to one-third of some guerrilla units—and in the case of Leon, 5 women were in command of the capture and running of the city.[35]

The literacy crusade brought even more women into important public roles. By far the more educationally neglected group in the country, women seized the opportunity to teach and study during the crusade—the CNA was to be their own personal vindication of past abandonment and subordination. During the CNA, women comprised the majority of teachers and technical personnel. In the follow-up adult education programme (EPB), they comprise 46 per cent of the students and instructional personnel.

As with the mobilisation of youth, once women were engaged in the process of national transformation through new teaching-learning roles, they became available for a variety of other tasks—notably militia duty and voluntary participation in agricultural production. Whereas many women had merely been *simpatizantes* (sympathisers) of the Sandinista cause, participation in the educational campaign changed them into politically conscious militants.

That traditional sex role perceptions and modes of interaction will completely change within a span of several years is not to be expected. But the high incidence of reported divorces and separations attests to the tensions that accompany such changes.

It should be noted further that gender role changes being wrought in the field of education are supported by other policies of the Sandinista government in the areas of mass media (banning the 'commercialisation of women'),[36] and job opportunities. Moreover, the national women's association, AMNLAE, is represented on the Council of State.

Strengthening of mass organisations

Another significant outcome of the CNA was the strengthening of the mass organisations as valid and effective means of popular participation in the postwar period of reconstruction. The continued democratisation of post-Somoza Nicaragua depends on the vitality and expansion of these organisations. Furthermore, given the poverty of the country, these organisations are critical to mobilising people to contribute voluntary labour and to stimulating workers to higher levels of productivity.

At the beginning of the crusade, many of the mass associations were in a fledgling state. As Treumann notes:

> We (the brigadistas) brought organisation and more services. The *campesinos* had organised to receive us and part of our work was to help those first committees expand into community organisations, farmworkers' associations, women's groups and the people's militias. Or, as the members of these groups now like to say, it was during the literacy crusade they 'put in the batteries' and got going.[37]

On the Atlantic Coast, the crusade is credited with greatly strengthening the teachers' association, ANDEN, which nearly doubled in membership. And according to Ministry of Education personnel in Puerto, Cabezas, the literacy workers also helped organise the Association of Rural Workers (ATC). On a national level, the crusade contributed significantly to swelling the ranks af the Sandinista Juventud 19 de Julio and the Association of Nicaraguan Women (Luisa Amanda Espinoza).

While organisations like the ATC now have over 100,000 members national, it should be noted that the National Literacy

Crusade represents, to date, the most extensive mobilisation of the people. The crusade not only involved one out of every five Nicaraguans as either a teacher or a student, but tens of thousands of people in support activities.[38] At present, the CEPs, with 165,000 learners and 25,000 instructional personnel, comprise the largest mass organisation in the country.

The CNA served as a model of voluntary collective effort to resolve pressing social needs. This model has been applied to subsequent efforts in education—the CEPs—and to other areas such as health. In October 1981, over 80,000 people were mobilised for a three-day period to distribute anti-malarial pills. More ambitious is the plan to train over 20,000 health *brigadistas* along the lines used in the CNA.[39] In addition to the *brigadistas*, the government is in the process of establishing Popular Health Commissions (CPS) which will be community-level agencies concerned with identifying local health problems and launching educational and self-help efforts to improve living conditions.[40]

The National Literacy Crusade and Popular Basic Education have demonstrated the philosophy of the Sandinista regime that when the people want a basic service they can provide it to themselves through their communal efforts. The role of the government is to assist with mobilising the population and providing necessary material support, training and technical advice.[41]

Integrating the Atlantic Coast

The campaign in languages signalled the intentions of the national government to begin integrating the Atlantic Coast with the rest of the country while respecting its cultures. Philippe Bourgeois describes the campaign's intended outcomes in this way: 'By emphasising . . . what appears superficially to contradict national unity- the distinctive identities of the ethnic minorities—a greater trust and sympathy for the government is actually promoted.[42] In keeping with this thrust, the government made special efforts to train indigenous instructional personnel—over three-fourths of the literacy workers in the campaign came from the region—and to revise the literacy materials from the CNA to reflect (in the photographs,

drawings, and content) the people, terrain, economy, and culture of the Atlantic Coast.

Among the integrative outcomes of the literacy campaigns on the East Coast are a greater familiarity with written Spanish on the part of the indigenous population, an awareness of national symbols and figures like Sandino, and a sharing in the folk culture of the Pacific Coast peoples. Furthermore, the campaigns brought with them access to other important services, particularly in the area of health: thousands were tested for eyeglasses, inoculated, and referred to health centres.

Serious problems also have beset the literacy campaigns and the follow-up EPB. Steadman Fagoth, a leader of the Miskito people and indigenous association MISURASATA (Miskito, Sumu, Rama, Sandinista Aslatakan—'united together') used the campaign to help reach and organise Miskitos in what eventually turned out to be anti-government activities.[43] In February 1981, when Fagoth was detained by the Sandinista government, a great number of Miskitos pulled-out of the language campaign, and when Fagoth subsequently escaped to Honduras in May of 1981, thousands went with him; the ranks of many CEPs were depleted and it is estimated that only about one-third of the target population of Miskitos are now participating in EPB. Furthermore, the adult education programme in the northern coastal area has been constantly disrupted as student and teacher members of the Sandinista militia have been called up to combat counter-revolutionary incursions from Honduras and to be prepared against external threats from the United States.[44]

The integration of the Atlantic Coast remains problematic. The region still, contains separatist and hostile elements and many more who are taking a cautious wait-and-see approach; and even among the pro-government supporters who have worked actively in the literacy campaign there is a strong sense of regionalism and a desire for more resources to be channeled to the coast. While the CNA and EPB have stimulated greater national awareness on the part of the people and strengthened several mass organisations national in scope, the progressive integration of the region will depend, more fundamentally, on major improvements in transportation and

communication systems, on the availability of capital for economic development, and the working out of a modus operandi by which the natural resources of the Atlantic Coast can be jointly exploited by indigenous communities and the national government to the satisfaction of both sides.[45]

Questions and conclusions

What impact did the literacy campaigns have on the political culture of Nicaragua, on the stated goal of the 'humanistic transformation of Nicaraguan society?'[46] Some eighteen months after the termination of the crusade, it is possible to point to positive outcomes. The CNA played a critical role in helping to overcome the inequities between countryside and city, males and females, the Atlantic and Pacific Coasts. It contributed to the mobilisation and induction of previously marginal populations – peasantry and women, the youth and the aged—into new roles related to national reconstruction. The crusade played an important part in strengthening mass organisations—notably the Juventud Sandinista 19 de Julio, the teachers' association (ANDEN), and the Nicaraguan Women's Association (Luisa Amanda Espinoza).

Among the important lessons of the crusade are the notions that people are not only recipients of culture, but creators of culture,[47] and that communities by their own efforts, and in conjunction with the government, can provide basic social services. Moreover, community groups and mass organisations are currently assuming a greater role in the shaping of national educational and cultural policies.[48]

The limitations of the campaigns also have been noted: male-female relations do not change that easily, the integration of the Atlantic Coast involves substantial obstacles, and the initial good will and regime support engendered by the CNA—widely regarded as the outstanding achievement of the revolution—is also contingent upon government initiatives in other areas. Also problematic is the level of literacy skills attained by people in such a brief period. And it remains to be seen whether or not the newly acquired skills will be successfully applied to increasing economic productivity,[49] better health, more adequate housing, and effective communal action.

There is a need for systematic long term research on the impact of the literacy campaigns on communities and individuals differently exposed to it. Among the questions that need to be examined are these: in what ways has participation in the crusade and follow-up adult education programmes contributed to improvement in life chances of differently situated individuals and groups? Will the practices that held communities together in the past be supplanted by or reinforced by the educational and cultural policies of the new regime? Will the innovative and community-based, non-formal education programmes prosper or will they be subordinated to an increasing demand for formal schooling? In what ways will people combine traditional beliefs with the alternative explanations of society and human nature articulated by the Sandinista regime? To what extent, as in other revolutionary societies, will there be a discrepancy between the attitudes and values individuals hold and the new roles they are called upon by national authorities to perform? And as Fagen asks, how does a political regime maintain high levels of sacrifice in a post-revolutionary period?[50]

Heroic struggle is still very much the order of the day as the Sandinista regime attempts to overcome a history of underdevelopment and foreign domination. Conducting a campaign of the scope and significance of the Nicaraguan Great National Literacy Crusade would have been impossible under the previous Somoza regime, based as it was on the exclusion of the rural and low-income populations of the country. The CNA was reflection of the historical reality of the country in 1979-80, a reflection of the aspirations, forces, and resources that existed in Nicaraguan society as it merged out of despotism and set about creating a more just social order. A dialectical relationship now exists in that the literacy crusade has contributed to the capacity of the society to undertake national reconstruction. At the same time, the utilisation of the multiple talents and revolutionary consciousness awakened by the literacy campaign will depend to a great extent on the transformations occurring in other sectors of the society. It is said in Nicaragua that the revolution is the greatest teacher of all—that the literacy campaign was born of the armed struggle against Somoza, and that the pedagogy and content of education

will continue to derive from the ongoing struggles in the country. It is also said that to educate a society is to effect a revolution. Thus, education and revolution are inextricably related in Nicaragua, each contributing to the forward momentum of the other.

Notes

[1]The 1980 National Literacy Crusade and follow-up campaigns reached approximately half a million people within the first 19 months of a new revolutionary government. The closest parallel is Cuba, which two years after its revolution, launched a national campaign—reducing illiteracy from 23.6% to 3.9% in an eight-month period. Other cases which are notable, but which involved larger periods of time, include Tanzania, the USSR, the Peoples' Republic of China, Vietnam, and Burma. Somali launched an impressive campaign between 1973 and 1975 but due to political events in that country, was unable to sustain its initial efforts. For further details, see H.S. Bhola, *Campaigning for Literacy* (Paris: UNESCO, 1982).

[2]Statistics that highlight the destruction wrought by the civil war include some 35,000-40,000 killed; 100,000 wounded, of whom 40,000 require continuing medical attention; 40,000 orphaned children; 200,000 homeless families and $1.8 billion in total material costs (i e., approximately $581 million in physical damage, $630 million in revenues lost due to a reduction of the Gross Domestic Product, and $600 million of losses in foreign exchange reserves due to capital flight and illicit withdrawals). These data are cited from the Fact Sheet of the Centre for International Policy, 'The Impact of Civil War in Nicaragua,' mimeographed (Washington, D.C.: Centre for International Policy, n.d.). When Somoza fled in July 1979, he left 3 million dollars in foreign reserves in the central bank and a deficit of 1.6 billion dollars.

[3]Nicaraguan Ministry of Education, 'The Great National Literacy Campaign: Heroes and Martyrs for the Creation of Nicaragua,' mimeographed report, trans. and ed. National Network in Solidarity with the Nicaraguan People (Managua: Nicarguan Ministry of Education, January 1980), p. 1.

[4]Comments made by Richard Fagen to the panel on 'The Nicaraguan Revolution: A New Model?' (9th National Meeting of the Latin American Studies Association, Bloomington, Indiane October 18, 1980).

[5]The Government of National Reconstruction consists of a three-person ruling junta of whom two are from the national directorate of the militant and mass-based coalition (the Sandinista National Liberation Front) that defeated Somoza, and one is from the middle sector or bourgeoisie; the other governing body is the Council of State. The Council consists of 47 representatives of 29 different political, professional, economic, religious, and cultural institutions; the Sandinista political associations and mass organisations hold 24 of these seats. The council has co-legislative authority

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with Junta but, unlike the junta, cannot veto bills.

[6]For a detailed study of the role of the National Guard in maintaining the Somoza family in power for a period of 4 decades, see Richard Millett, *Guardians of the Dynasty*, (New York: Orbis, 1977).

[7]The framework for undertaking such an analysis is provided by Richard Fagen in *The Transformation of Political Culture in Cuba* (Stanford, University Press, 1969).

[8]Arthur Gillete, *Cuba's Educational Revolution* (London: Fabian Society 1972), p. 20. Gillette actually distinguished between education *for* communism and education *in* communism.

[9]The People's Literacy Teachers (Los Alfabetizadores Populares—AP) consisted of two types: over 20,000 'Urban Literacy Guerrillas,' who taught in the urban neighbourhoods, and some 3,000 worker-teachers, who taught in the factories and comprised the 'Workers' Literacy Militias.'

[10]Instruction took place in over 60,000 Sandinista Literacy Units (Unidades Sandinista de Alfbetizacion-UAS). These literacy units, in most cases, were a room or space set aside in a house, a barn, a shop. The UAS often consisted of no more than a table, a few chairs or benches, an oil cloth on which to write with chalk, and swatches of butcher paper posted on the walls with letters of the alphabet and simple words.

[11]Students in certain disciplines in the university and vocational—technical students who fields were considered by the government to be critical to national development were encouraged to continue their studies rather than join the literacy army in the countryside.

[12]*Vencimos; La Cruzada de Alfabetizacion de Nicaragua; Libro Abierto a Latino America* (Canada: International Development Research Centre, forthcoming, 1982).

[13]Instruction in mathematical concepts using the primer *Calculo by Reactivacion: Una Sola Operacion* was of secondary importance and was usually not undertaken until the student had successfully completed the literacy primer.

[14]For further discussion of these points, see my article, 'The Nicaraguan National Literacy Crusade of 1980,' *Comparative Review*, (June, 1981), pp. 55-56.

[15]A parallel situation existed in Cuba. See, the discussion of Jonathan Kozol, 'A New Look at the Literacy Campaign in Cuba,' *Harvard Educational Review*, 48 (Summer 1978), pp 341-77, especially at p. 354.

[16]Paulo Freire visited Nicaragua for a 10-day period prior to the commencement of the CNA. After consulting with the team of educators designing the campaign, he announced his enthusiastic support for both its content and pedagogy.

[17]See, for example, the discussion of Kozol, 'Literacy Campaign in Cuba,' p. 364.

[18]Paulo Freire, 'The Adult Literacy Process as Cultural Action for Freedom,' *Harvard Educational Review*, 40 (May 1970): 205-23, and his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970). Also see

Robert F. Arnove and Jairo Arboleda, 'Literacy: Power or Mystification?' *Literacy Discussion*,[4] (December 1973), 389-414.

[19]For further discussion along these lines, see Martin Carnoy, *Education as Cultural Imperialism* (New York: McKay, 1974), esp. chap. 1

[20]Eighty per cent of the children in rural areas were not in school, and 21 per cent of the illiterates in the country were accounted for by youths in the age group 10-14. Under 25 per cent of the appropriate age group (13-18) were enrolled in secondary school, while according to the *Encyclopedia of the Third World* (ed.) George Thomas Kurian (New York: Facts on File, 1978), 2: 1065), 5.38 per 1,000 (about 8 per cent) of the appropriate age group were enrolled in universities. Nicaragua ranked eighty-sixth in the world in adjusted school enrollment for primary and secondary education, but sixty-first in per capita univesity enrollment in 1976.

[21]For further discussion, see Philippe Bourgeois, 'Class Ethnicity and the State among the Miskito Amerindians of Northeastern Nicaragua,' *Latin American Perspectives*, 29 (Spring 1981), pp. 22-39; and Philip A. Dennis, 'The Costenos and The Revolution in Nicaragua,' *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, 23 (August 1981), pp. 271-96.

[22]According to the Centre for Information and Documentation of the Atlantic Coast (Centrode Information y Documentation de la Costa Atlantica), 62% of the costenos are Spanish-speaking Latinos; 25% Miskito-speaking; 9% English-speaking; 1.74% Sumo-speaking; 35% Carib-speaking and 2% Rama-speaking. The 62% Spanish-speaking is a high estimate.

[23]Illiteracy was relatively low among the English-speaking inhabitants who tend to be fundamentalist Protestants placing great emphasis on reading the Bible.

[24]Ministry of Education officials estimate that by the end of 1981, illiteracy had been reduced to 11.5% of the population as a result of the CNA, the campaign in indigenous languages, and the follow-up activities of the CEPs. This figure does not include some 130,000 people declared learning impaired who due to blindnees, debilitating illnesses, advanced age, senility, and institutionalisation were not able to participate in the literacy campaigns.

[25]'Logros de Educacion in 1981: Consulta, Educacion de Adultos e Inversiones,' *Barricada*, December 18, 1981, p. 10.

[26]Buan B. Arrien, 'Pasos hacia la Transformacion del Sistema Educativo,' mimeo (Managua: Ministry of Education, October 26, 1981), p. 10.

[27]According to Bulletin n. 13 of *La Cruzada en Marcha* (Managua: CNA/Ministry of Education, July 1980), p. 7. 'Brigadistas' helped build 2, 2,862 latrines, 75 wells, 96 schools, 34 roads, 50 bridges, 37 health centers, and had participated in the planting and harvesting of thousands of acres of various fruits and vegetables.

[28]For example, of the 20,000 plus members of the JS 19 de Julio, 5,000 have volunteered for militia duty, and 11,000 have participated in the harvest of coffee, cotton, and sugar cane. See 'Entre Palmas Juveniles JS Comenzo.II Asamblea,' *Barricada*, December 20, 1981, p. 1.

[29]Francisco Lacayo, in *Primer Congress Nacional de Educacion Popular de Adultos* (Managua: Ministerio de Education, June 6-7, 1981), p. 36.

[30]Beverly Treumann, 'Nicaragua's Second Revolution,' *Christianity and Crisis*, 41 (November 2, 1911), pp. 297-98.

[31]For example, see. Carlos Tunnermann Bernheim, 'Proyeccion Cultural de la Cruzada National de Alfabetizacion,' in the magazine section *Vergara* of *Barricada*, January 23, 1982, pp. 15-16.

[32]Onfre Guevara L., 'La JS 19: Un a Posicion Ganada en la Lucha,' *Barricada*, December 22, 1981, p. 3.

[33]Ibid.

[34]Treumann, 'Nicaragua's Second Revolution,' p. 299.

[35]Warren Hoge, 'Women Win New Role in Nicaragua,' *Austin American Stateman*, January 15, 1982, p. E-4.

[36]Ibid.

[37]Treumann, 'Nicaragua's Second Revolution,' p. 295.

[38]Ibid., pp. 291-92.

[39]In the case of the CNA, a pyramid of trainers was organised. Eighty trainees (half teachers and half students) were prepared in a 15-day course; these 80 trained 560. The multiplier effect then proceeded in this fashion: from 560 to 7,000 to more than 100,000 literacy workers.

[40]'Jornadas Populares de Salud, pamphlet (Managua: Ministry of Health, 1981).

[41]Bayardo Arce, in *Primer Congreso National de Educacion Popular de Adultos*, p. 31.

[42]Bourgeoise, 'Miskito Amerindinas of Northeastern Nicaragua,' p. 37.

[43]William Ramirez, 'El Problem Indigena y la Amenaza Imperialista en Nicaragua,' in the magazine section *Vergara*, *Barricada*, January 6, 1982, pp. 13-14.

[44]As a case in point, thousands were mobilised during the first two weeks of October as the United States and Honduras armed forces engaged in joint military exercises close to the Nicaraguan coast. The naval and marine forces of these two countries simulated invading a country 'X' in Central America, and intercepting ships destined for it. See, 'La Costa Atlantica presente en la Defensa de la Revolucion,' Boletin *Innica*, November 1981, p. 2. And 'Halcon Vista and the Response of the Nicaraguan People,' mimeo Instituto Historico Centroamericano, Apartado A-194, Managua, Nicaragua, Dispatch n. 6, November 15, 1981.

[45]For recent efforts of the government to assist with the development of the region, see, for example, the November 1981 issue of El Boletin *Innica*, p. 3- 'Nuestros Fuentes de Production' and 'Los Recursos Naturales y Las Comunidades Indigenas.'

[46]Carlos Tunnerman Bernheim, in *Primer Congreso Nacional de Educacion Popular de Adultos*, p. 21.

[47]Charles L. Stanisfer, 'Cultural Policy in the Old and the New Nicaragua,' American Universities Field Staff Reports, Number 41, South America, 1981; and Juan B. Arrien, 'Aprendizaje en Campanas,' mimeo

(Managua: Ministry of Education, Office of Planning and Development, October 2, 1981), pp. 9-10.

[48]Some 30 mass organisations met at the end of January 1982 to help formulate the goals and objectives of a new education system; See 'Logros de Educacion,' note n. 24 and Arrien, 'Pasos hacia la Transformacion.'

[49]Bayardo Arce, *Primer Congreso Nacional de Educacion Popular de Adultos*, p. 30.

[50]Fagen, *Transformation of Political Culture*, p. 164.

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The national literacy campaign Nicaragua which reduced illiteracy of the population 10 years of age and older from 50 to 15 per cent within a short period of nine months, was part of the struggle for a new social order. Though there was officially no compulsion, the participation of teachers, office and factory workers, housewives and students was altogether remarkable. The pedagogical concepts of Paulo Freire were used though his model was adapted to meet the specific needs of the people: for example, a primer 'Sunrise of the People' was used which contained 23 generative themes. The analysis of the outcome of the national literacy programme and its follow-up shows significant change in the political consciousness of the youth who participated; strengthening of people's organisations; new perception of female roles, and cultural integration through the deveopment of a new political culture.

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